Digital Communities

Government Services Enhanced With Digital Technologies

Municipal governments are seeking new ways to expand and improve the delivery of services for both businesses and citizens and address two broad categories of objectives. The first is to promote economic growth, enhance citizen safety and security, and citizen satisfaction with government services. The second is to do this while driving efficiencies and lower operational costs. This can't be done without the right digital infrastructure: one that enables ubiquitous, fast access to information, services and transactions, with a simple, intuitive, contextual organization and presentation that is relevant to the constituent.

Challenges

- The race is on between cities to attract and keep businesses in order to broaden their tax bases and provide jobs for their citizens;

- Governments are faced with increasing criticism and frustration from citizens and businesses regarding how services and information are communicated and delivered, resulting in customer satisfaction issues;

- Municipalities are placing an equally high priority on ensuring the safety and security of their citizens and businesses, to manage situations that range from local crime prevention and containment, to major natural disasters and terrorism;

- The pressure to avoid or minimize budget increases fuels an emphasis on improving the productivity of municipal workers, and the overall efficiency of government and its services;

- Governments are constantly looking to create new services that will result in new revenue streams – to both enhance service delivery and help counteract budget increases;

- City populations are becoming more diverse due to ethnic and age-related fluctuations, with all of the associated requirements to communicate and deliver services in ways that recognize and support diversity;

- Providing a range of communication approaches and varying levels of information to match specific skills and competencies of the community's demographics is becoming increasingly challenging;

- Confusion over where to go and whom to speak with to get information multiplies as government services are added, cut or changed;

- A 'digital divide' has arisen in some cases within a community, with one section of the community having the networking and information resources and skills necessary to access online services, while other segments lack these resources and skills.

Technology Barriers

- Municipal departments have rolled out silo-based, incompatible systems to meet the parochial requirements of distinct user groups, with no thought to integration or delivery of similar information to larger audiences (which in turn would ensure a broad-based return on the specific investment);

- Older, legacy systems supporting municipal services are often single-purpose systems that are not able to accommodate change (e.g., a legacy hardware/software client-server system could print a hard copy, uni-lingual Waste Management & Recycling calendar for distribution to residences but comes up short when challenged with the creation of multi-lingual calendars, for online delivery to multi-unit condominium and rental dwellings);

- The most recent technology 'fixes' to improve service delivery saw numerous front-end Internet interfaces added to legacy systems, but instead of improving adoption rates and accelerating 'self service' trends, these 'fixes,' with their multiple sign-on and password requirements, have tended to deter citizens from using them;

- The onus placed on providers of municipal services, including private–public partnerships, for easy-to-use systems demands that information access be simple and intuitive at the point of contact, with additional information complexity and detail delivered on demand. But many technologies, such as voicemail systems and government web sites, can be unduly complicated, which leads to misunderstandings and citizen frustration.

The Vizible Solution

- Provides simple, easy navigation of huge amounts of varied and often complex information, across multiple silos;

- Addresses a broad range of constituents' needs by delivering informative, personalized views of municipal information;

- Provides any content from any source and then packages it into 'views' that meet the specific needs and characteristics of the community's audiences, supporting 'mixed use' deployments through customization and personalization;

- Enables on-demand assembly and presentation of information to address differing needs of depth and complexity;

- Links in real-time to relevant content, applications, web cams, Internet links, etc. regardless of their physical locations;

- Gives access to timely, relevant information;

- Facilitates controlled collaboration, based on the sharing of information where appropriate, at the same time preserving the privacy of municipal records, data sources, applications, etc.;

- Avoids costly back-end integration with multiple content sources, regardless of location.

The Benefits

- Economic attractiveness and vitality of a community is enhanced, in turn luring and keeping businesses, with all of the associated benefits (broader tax base, more jobs, increased sales of municipal bonds given the increased financial soundness of a city stemming from an increased business base);

- Public and private buildings, spaces and thoroughfares become safer with the increased surveillance and detection technologies orchestrated by a Vizible solution, enhancing the safety, security and quality of life of the municipality (and strengthening the case for business expansion);

- Citizen (and business) satisfaction levels with government services increase, as ethnic, linguistic and cognitive differences are addressed through facilitating access to, understanding of, and interaction with a diverse and broad range of community services in a context the constituent can understand;

- Barriers between government and the community are broken down, fostering greater community involvement;

- Productivity of municipal employees is increased and budgets maximized by a) empowering citizens to take control of their interactions with government staff, (i.e., access information, conduct transactions, submit requests, etc.), either online or offline, and b) improving the efficiency with which municipal workers perform their daily tasks and deliver community services;

- New programs are easily introduced, communicated and administered, resulting in new revenue streams that are efficiently delivered;

- Operational costs are reduced, through efficiencies achieved in service delivery;

- The likelihood of gaining the attention of the Federal Government – and receiving grants to further improve municipal government service delivery – is increased;

- Better use of government investments in (formerly) silo-architected databases and repositories is achieved when the same information is repurposed for government workers, private businesses and citizens, but presented in formats that each prefers, matching their needs and the task at hand;

- City budgets are preserved, and both information technology and human resources are maximized;

- The 'digital divide' is lessened by implementing a digital infrastructure that makes information available to all, at many, easily-accessed spots on the network (e.g., libraries, schools, public buildings, drop-in centers, community centers).

Who Can it Help, and How?

• For the **individual citizen**, a city-implemented Vizible solution can empower them to take actions without tying up valuable human resources, by giving them a simple, intuitive and compelling 'view' of typical services (e.g., tax, utility, licensing and parking payments) and allowing them to do their own transactions. These views can be delivered to them over the Internet, via kiosks in public spaces or even through mobile phone screens;

• **Municipality managers and employees** can use a Vizible solution to automate, integrate and manage their standard, 'business as usual' applications (e.g., public works orders, archival records, rate and tax payer contact information, financial data, search systems, etc.), allowing them to share information and process their work faster;

• **Municipal employees at citizen 'touch points'** – such as 311 phone operators – can use a Vizible solution to assemble multiple views of common services, in context, to answer inquiries and deal with them in a timely and informative manner, thus saving money and increasing citizen satisfaction and safety;

• Managers and **front-line, first-responder personnel** (i.e., law enforcement, emergency services, fire, rescue, etc.) – 911 scenarios for the most part – have:
  a) remote monitoring,
  b) interoperability between organizations, unified by Vizible's personalized information views,
  c) more coordinated response across the chain of command,
  d) 'best knowledge' decisions based on having the right information, at the right time, and
  e) a virtual 'command and control center' view so that the entire team can respond to emergencies;

• Specifically in the area of **e-Surveillance and ongoing security management** activity, Vizible enables the delivery of informative, contextual views of public and private facilities, spaces and thoroughfares, and systems monitoring these areas, by leveraging Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) cameras, alarms, environmental sensors and video ID systems.